

MERLINS BRIDGE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting 15th December 2021 at 7pm, online via the Zoom videoconferencing platform

Present: Cllrs. John Cole, Alison Palmer, Queenie Thomas, Janice Morgan, Paul Davies; Peter Horton (Clerk).

Apologies

C'llrs. Mary Owen, Hilliard Studley, Nick Stamp.

Declaration of known interests

C'llr Paul Davies declared a personal and prejudicial interest in any substantive discussion on the agenda item to discuss the rejected complaint by the Ombudsman of an alleged breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Approval of minutes of November 2021 monthly meeting

These were approved by Members, and retained by the Clerk for signature by the Chairman following the meeting (proposer C'llr John Cole, seconder C'llr Janice Morgan).

Matters arising

Donation to school. Members were informed that the £200 donation had been passed to the school. On the separate matter of possible provision of sweets for the children's trip to the pantomime, the School had said they did not want the children to have sweets, but would appreciate any other donation that was felt to be appropriate. However, Members felt that enough had been done for the present, especially with the selection boxes that had also been given to the children.

Carol service. Members were informed that the carol service had been poorly attended, and would need to be better advertised on future occasions.

Ombudsman complaint against C'llr John Cole. Members were informed that the complaint made to the Ombudsman against C'llr John Cole for a possible breach of the Members' code of conduct had been rejected by the Ombudsman, as no breach of the code of conduct was considered to have taken place.

Speed activated sign. One quotation had been received to date, from Coeval. The others were still awaited. Clerk to agenda an item as soon as the remaining quotations had been received.

Zebra crossing. Members were informed that one of the flashing beacon lights was non-functioning. C'llr John Cole undertook to look into this.

Cutting back of vegetation around highway signs in Clay Lane. Still in hand with C'llr John Cole.

Discussion of arrangements for filling open council vacancies

The Chairman mentioned that she had consulted with the Elections Office, who had advised that efforts should continue to be made to fill any vacancies, right up until the time of the scheduled elections in May if necessary.

Members voted to co-opt Mrs. Veronica James. (Proposer C'llr John Cole, seconder C'llr Janice Morgan).

Members voted to co-opt Mrs. Michelle Lewis (Proposer C'llr John Cole, seconder C'llr Janice Morgan).

Clerk to make arrangements for the necessary administrative formalities to be completed with both new members.

Clerk to arrange to advertise the recent vacancy that had arisen following the resignation of C'llr Lisa O'Sullivan.

Discussion of rejected Ombudsman complaint against C'llr Paul Davies

C'llr Paul Davies made a statement to those present. He noted that the complaint, made for alleged bullying, had been rejected. He mentioned that, in previous occupations, he had been responsible for constructing bullying cases. He commented that such cases are very hard to prove, with a high burden of proof required. He felt that people need to be careful to avoid saying things that are either untrue, or cannot be proved, and felt that the complaint should never have been made.

Noting that the complaint had been dismissed by the Ombudsman, and had not been made by the Council, Members did not have any substantive discussion on the matter.

Discussion of protocol for Members taking forward matters on behalf of Council

C'llr John Cole commented that he had been asked by the Council to look into various matters of concern regarding Highway issues in the community. However, he noted that following this, C'llrs Paul Davies and Nick Stamp had been to see Darren Thomas in P.C.C. regarding these matters, causing confusion. He was concerned that Members should not take matters forward without getting clearance from the Council.

C'llr Paul Davies responded by saying that everything he had done with P.C.C. had been with the agreement of the Council, and that he and C'llr Nick Stamp had been asked by the Council to pursue these matters.

C'llr John Cole disputed this, and felt that the minutes should be checked to see what had actually happened. However, there was no formal resolution regarding this, and the matter was left in abeyance.

[NOTE – C'llr Paul Davies left the meeting at this point with apologies]

Plans

Applications

21/0823/PA - Change of use from scrapyard (sui generis) to B8 storage compound (re-using existing shed / workshop); Site Address: Scrap Yard, Magdalene Street, MERLINS BRIDGE, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, SA61 1JJ – No objections.

Correspondence

- 1) Ombudsman – Notification of decision not to investigate complaint against C'llr John Cole – dealt with in 'Matters Arising' above.
- 2) Ombudsman – Notification of decision not to investigate complaint by local resident against C'llr Paul Davies – Dealt with in agenda item above.
- 3) Lisa O'Sullivan – Message of resignation from the community council – dealt with in agenda item above. Clerk to send letter of thanks to her for her valuable contribution to the community council during her time of membership, and especially for her work in handling accounts and administration while the Council had been

without an employed Clerk (proposer C’Ilr John Cole, seconder C’Ilr Queenie Thomas).

- 4) P.C.C. – Consultation on proposed ‘No waiting’ restrictions proposed for the area around the junction of Woodlands Park – noted.
- 5) Frame – Request for land for community garden – Clerk to respond to explain that the community council would be unable to assist, as it does not have ownership of any land (proposer C’Ilr Janice Morgan, seconder C’Ilr Alison Palmer).
- 6) Mrs. Veronica James – Query about reasons for non-co-option (held over from November) – superseded by agreed co-option agreed in agenda item above.
- 7) V.C. gallery – Request for financial assistance – Members agreed a £250 donation. Formal approval of expenditure dealt with in ‘Accounts’ below.

Accounts

Income

Precept (final instalment) : £3333-00

Payments

Clerk (salary / fixed expenses, October – December 2021) : As per contract
H.M.R.C. (P.A.Y.E. tax) : As per contract
Clerk (incidental expenses incurred, September – November 2021) : £ 25-14
John Cole (reimbursement for selection boxes for school) : £151-20
John Cole (reimbursement for Christmas tree provision) : £816-00
Cleddau Press (Christmas cards) : £318-00
VC Gallery (Donation) : £250-00

The above payments were approved by Members (proposer C’Ilr Janice Morgan, seconder C’Ilr Alison Palmer).

Donations

[NOTE – C’Ilr John Cole took no part in the discussion on the two payments made to reimburse him for expenditure incurred].

Monthly accounts statement (effective November 30th 2021)

Total expenditure in financial year to November 30th : £10710-02
Total income in financial year to November 30th 2021 : £ 6926-77
Total funds on hand on November 30th 2021 (all accounts) : £23384-11
Clerk to circulate amounts on hand in each of the two accounts to Members following the meeting.

Precept for 2022/23

The Clerk had circulated precept notes / budget projections for 2022/23 to all Members in advance of the meeting. Members approved certain amendments to this, producing a projected budget of £26,000. Clerk to circulate amended final budget to Members following the meeting.

Members agreed a precept for 2022/23 of £10000 (proposer C’Ilr John Cole, seconder C’Ilr Janice Morgan).

County Councillor’s report

Surveying work ongoing in community streets. Members were informed that surveying was being undertaken in connection with proposed highway improvements and broadband infrastructure works proposed.

Gates into Haroldston Ruins. Members were informed that these had been locked by the landowner. The matter was in hand with the P.C.C. Public Rights of Way department, those officers were in communication with the landowner regarding the matter.

Discussion of possible gesture for the schoolchildren at St. Mark's School

Potential further donation dealt with in 'Matters Arising' above.

Members thanked C'llr Janice Morgan for arranging the printing and distribution of the Christmas cards in the community along with her friend.

Members asked C'llr Janice Morgan to convey their thanks to Cleddau Press for their assistance in the printing of the cards, which had been much appreciated.

C'llr John Cole undertook to deliver the selection boxes to the school for distribution to the schoolchildren.

Discussion of / report on Armed Forces Covenant

C'llr John Cole informed Members that all principal councils and Government departments have an armed forces covenant, which was a statement of commitment to principles of non-discrimination undertaking against armed forces veterans.

Members agreed for C'llr John Cole to make the necessary arrangements for M.B.C.C. to adopt a similar undertaking, possibly as the first community council to do so (proposer C'llr Janice Morgan, seconder C'llr Alison Palmer).

Discussion of formation of Children's Committee

Left in abeyance for the time being.

Discussion of possible need for Social Media policy

Members agreed to leave this matter in abeyance, while agreeing on the general need to exercise care in the use of social media.

Discussion of Community Council grant scheme proposal

Matter left in abeyance.

Discussion of future meeting arrangements in the light of recent / updated Welsh Government guidance on multi-location meeting requirement

Matter to be discussed in January, when it was hoped that some decision could be made on future arrangements. In the meantime, it was agreed for the January meeting to be held online. Other potential venues to be investigated by Members in the meantime, in case the Welfare Hall should be unavailable for any future in-person meetings.

Any other business

Playground inspections. C'llr Mary Owen had wanted the matter of inspections of the playground owned by the Welfare Committee to be mentioned. It was understood that there was some difficulty in arranging these at present. C'llr John Cole mentioned that he was investigating options with P.C.C.

Next meeting

Wednesday 12th January 2022 at 7pm.

The meeting was closed at 8-50pm.